



News Release

For immediate release: August 04, 2011

(11-117)

Contacts: [Julie Graham](#)

Communications Office

360-236-4022

Recent drownings are tragic reminders about the importance of water safety

More than 120 life jacket loan stations in Washington help avoid tragedy and keep summer fun

OLYMPIA — High winter snow pack and a cold, wet spring have left many of Washington's waters very cold and rivers flowing fast even though it's mid-summer. This creates dangerous conditions when the long-awaited sun brings people to the water.

"Just last month 20 people in our state lost their lives to drowning," says Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "Preventing a drowning tragedy starts by making sure that everyone playing, swimming, or boating in or near the water is wearing a life jacket – period, no exceptions."

In Washington there are more than 120 life jacket loaner stations where water-users can borrow a life jacket for the day. At the end of the day, people return them to the station. Local Safe Kids Coalitions, Fire and EMS agencies, hospitals, parks departments, and private marinas sponsor the loan programs.

Drowning is the second leading cause of injury death for children and teens. Most drowning deaths in Washington State happen in open water — lakes, rivers, salt water, and ponds.

There are some simple things you can do to reduce the drowning risk for you and your family:

In our state, children under 13 years of age, while on boats less than 19 feet long, are required to wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jacket that fits properly. Parents are strong role models – children and teens are more likely to wear a life jacket when parents wear them, too.

When swimming in the ocean or Puget Sound, beware of tidal changes and currents. These are powerful, unseen flows in salt water; undertows and tidal changes that can sweep people off their feet and out to sea. If you want to play in the surf, wear a life jacket; know the tide table, and follow warning signs. If you are caught in a rip current, swim parallel to the shore until you are out of the current, then swim into shore.

— More —

Here are some other tips for water safety:

- Supervise children when in or near the water. Stay within designated swimming areas. Swim where lifeguards are present.
- Be aware of water temperatures. Many rivers and lakes stay cold all summer; even if they get warm on the surface, they're cold below. Cold water makes it harder to swim, especially when someone is tired.
- Know your limits and your ability; stop before you are too tired.
- Check weather forecasts and be prepared for bad weather. Water and weather conditions can change quickly.
- Set limits with your children — when they can go in the water, where they can go, who has to be there to watch them, and what safety gear they must use.

An online list provides information of [Washington State Life Jacket Loaner Program locations](http://www.boatus.com/foundation/LJLP/usamapb.asp) (www.boatus.com/foundation/LJLP/usamapb.asp). [Drowning prevention information](http://doh.wa.gov/ehp/wr/watersafety.htm) (doh.wa.gov/ehp/wr/watersafety.htm) is available on the [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov), your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

###